

FOOD SYSTEMS SOLUTIONS DIALOGUES – Summary

Food Systems National Convenors with the FAO Director-General

Thursday, 12 January 2023

On 12 January 2023, the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub (the Hub) convened a virtual dialogue between the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Dr. QU Dongyu and the Food Systems National Convenors.

The objective of the dialogue was to consolidate understanding of the priorities for the work of the Hub and to discuss ways of continued support to national efforts to transform agrifood systems in the lead-up to the Stocktaking Moment in mid-2023. The dialogue was open for participation to National Convenors and their teams or other government food systems focal points, as well as to the UN agencies supporting the Hub. Attended by over 200 participants, the virtual event lasted 90 minutes and started with a keynote address from FAO's Director-General, followed by interventions from the National Convenors.

In preparing their participation, National Convenors were invited to consider the following questions:

- a) What is the position of the national pathway within your country's sustainable development agenda?
- b) What are the most critical factors to address in your country to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs through agrifood systems transformation?

The Director-General highlighted that the Hub is now fully functional and that FAO and the UN system are working together to provide technical support to national efforts aimed at planning and implementing sustainable agrifood systems transformation to achieve the SDGs. Moreover, the Director-General stressed that to achieve the ambitious, transformative changes required, there need to be changes in policies, mindsets, and business models. Dr. QU further shared that the Stocktaking Moment (STM) will provide opportunities to report on progress made at the national level since the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021.

The National Convenors welcomed the dialogue and expressed their appreciation for the continued support received from the Hub. They provided an overview of their efforts to transform agrifood systems and the opportunities, challenges, and bottlenecks that need to be addressed as priorities.

Expanding spaces for dialogue and peer-learning

Many countries delivered statements, noting their commitments towards implementing national pathways for food systems transformation as a follow-up to the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit. Most countries noted how agrifood systems transformation requires multiple actions, connecting the dots among several contemporary challenges, notably the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, impacts of the climate crisis, conflict, and the cost-of-living crisis.

Several interventions emphasized the need for strategies, policies, mobilization of appropriate finance at scale, technology, capacity building, and significant investment to ensure integrated agrifood systems transformation. In addition, speakers noted the importance of creating solutions together with affected communities, underlining the importance of investments in nutrition education, awareness campaigns and effective communication with multiple stakeholders.

The dialogue was an opportunity to learn about the variety of approaches and processes that exist when it comes to agrifood systems transformation. Many Convenors highlighted that there is no one-size-fits-all policy or approach, and that financial support and capacity building need to be adjusted to specific needs as well as to countries' unique contexts and national priorities.

Priority areas: bringing the SDGs back on track through agrifood systems transformation

Various interventions drew on national experiences, noting short and long-term adjustments that can transform food value chains and enable producers to become more productive while respecting planetary boundaries.

Countries outlined some of the challenges they are facing to transform their agrifood systems, such as the impacts of conflicts and increasing food prices. They also noted the importance of the Hub, led by FAO, and the crucial link its work must have with climate action and biodiversity protection.

Many speakers stressed the importance of finance as a critical component in implementing national pathways, noting that public finance can provide the right conditions for further engagement of the private sector and de-risking investment risks in long-term policies for agrifood systems transformation. Moreover, countries requested further action to enhance synergies between climate and food systems goals, calling for more awareness and action to promote climate-aware and healthy diets, which can contribute both to better nutrition and sustainability.

Many Convenors noted the relevance of further investments in national dialogues. Strong governance, improved income, and innovation policies were significant themes when communicating with multiple stakeholders. Countries stressed the importance of FAO's technical expertise when investing in rural areas, calling for the expansion of partnerships and the engagement of women and youth in targeted programs related to innovation, investment, and productivity.

Interventions also highlighted that the overarching goals of national pathways include enhancing consumers' education and behavioral change to promote healthier and more sustainable diets, reducing food loss and waste, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the agriculture sector by engaging farmers in more sustainable practices. Among these practices, several interventions mentioned, among other themes, the need to enhance research and innovation to expand organic agriculture, reduce the use of chemicals, improve animal husbandry and welfare, develop plant-based protein, provide support to smallholders, and make the whole food systems value chain more equitable.

Convenors took the opportunity to share updates about their work with Coalitions, such as those focusing on more nutritious school meals, soil health, digital food strategies, and efforts to reveal the "true value of food." Partnerships with academia were also noted.

In closing the dialogue, the Director-General expressed his appreciation for the contributions and valuable insights shared by the National Convenors. He reiterated the importance of national ownership and the leadership of the National Convenors as key to successful agrifood systems transformation, and also called for the effective implementation of national pathways to ensure progress on multiple SDGs. He reiterated that the Hub and FAO will continue to support the National Convenors in achieving the agrifood systems transformation they seek.

Background

The UN Food Systems Coordination Hub is hosted by FAO on behalf of the UN system and is supported by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Food Program (WFP), the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP), and the United Nations Development Coordination Office (UNDCO). The Hub's mission is to support countries to further develop and implement their national agrifood systems transformation pathways.